



# apestry

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By

Baumgarten

1897







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TAPESTRY WORKS OF WM. BAUMGARTEN & CO.,  
WILLIAMSBRIDGE, N. Y.

A SHORT RÉSUMÉ  
OF THE  
HISTORY OF TAPESTRY MAKING  
IN THE  
PAST AND PRESENT.

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A LECTURE

HELD BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIANS,  
AT THE ART INSTITUTE, CHICAGO,  
MARCH 25TH, 1897.

BY

WILLIAM BAUMGARTEN.







PAINTING THE CARTOONS.

THE making of tapestry in this country is only of very recent date, and to my knowledge it had never been attempted until I set up the first loom in my ateliers in New York, in the month of February, 1893. To my friends it seemed a rather bold and hazardous enterprise, because the very idea of tapestry making is at the present time so intimately connected with France, and associated with the Gobelin Works in Paris, and France is considered so absolutely its rightful home, that they did not believe there was any hope of success for my attempt, and those who were not my friends thought it too ridiculous, and predicted, of course, a dismal failure.

We are now four years at work, and have rapidly increased the size of our ateliers and the number of our looms to over twenty, and the number of persons employed to about forty. I shall, in the course of my lecture, give you a little sketch of how we work, what we make, where it is done, etc., and, by the help of the camera, will try to give you a lucid picture of it all.

Before proceeding, however, with the description of

our own tapestry making, it may be of interest to my audience to listen to a short résumé on the history of tapestry in the past, and its present condition in Europe.\*

As you all know, Tapestry is a fabric worked on a chain of threads which are drawn either vertically, *haute lisse*, or horizontally *basse lisse*, and around which are woven the colored threads of wool or silk, thus making one body, and producing a stuff in which the lines and tints form combinations analogous to those which the painter obtains with his brush, the mosaic worker with pieces of colored marble, the enameler with cloisons filled with vitrifiable materials. The laying in of the colored threads is done entirely by hand, and the weaver follows line by line the painting he is to copy. The difference between Tapestry and Embroidery is this: In Tapestry the figures or pictures form an integral part of the stuff itself, while in Embroidery the figure or ornament is put on a stuff already existing; and Tapestry is distinguished from woven stuffs in that it is entirely made by hand, and not by means of a mechanical loom which repeats endlessly the same design. Each piece of Tapestry is an original hand work, even

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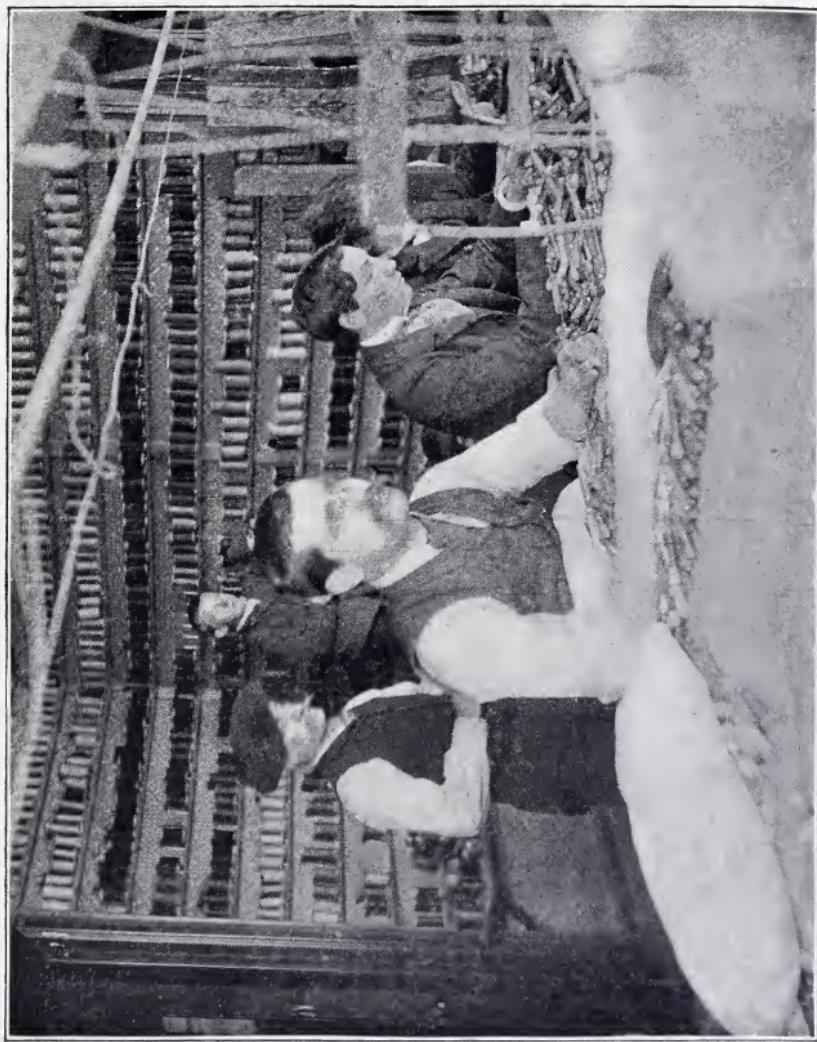
\* The information herein given was largely derived from the works of Eugene Muntz, Ed. Guichard, Alfred Darcel, and others.

where the same cartoons are copied many times. It has been aptly called "Painting by textile materials," and justly so, for while by the freedom in its mode of manufacture it is far ahead of Embroidery (which is, above all, a work of patience, and which admits of no end of retouching), it is also superior to Embroidery in that it leaves the weaver a certain amount of his individual interpretation, for he really translates, interprets and transposes in other tones the models or cartoons which the painter composes for him.

The art of transmitting figures or ornamental designs on the loom is probably as old as to paint them on the wall or panel. Egypt, which is the cradle of so many industries, knew at an early age the art of ornamenting fabrics by weaving, embroidery, and the application of colors. In the subterraneous temple at Beni-Hassan the wall paintings, which date back 3,000 years B. C., show the representation of an upright loom which, in its general arrangement, is singularly similar to those which are now in use at the Gobelin Works ; upright chain, cross beam, comb to ram down and to even the threads, etc., all the elements of the "Haute lisso" loom are there. Nor are there historical proofs wanting that the Egyptians at the time of the Pharaohs produced fabrics of extraordinary richness and fineness, which had

no reason to be envious of our modern industry. The same may be said of Western Asia and Greece. The ancient authors are unanimous in proclaiming the magnificence displayed by Babylon and Nineveh in textile hangings, embroideries and carpets. You have all read in the book "Esther" the description of the feast given by Ahasuerus, of the magnificent hangings of sky-blue, of white and hyacinth, suspended on purple cords, with silver rings, from white marble columns.

The ability of Babylonian tapestry weavers equaled the magnificent compositions of her artists which they transmitted on their looms, and the richness of the materials which they used. Plinius does not hesitate to claim for them the honor of having carried to the highest point the art of blending colors in fabrics. He adds, that owing to their superiority these fabrics were given the name of "Babylonians," the same as we to-day call tapestries generally "Gobelins." In fact the words, "Babylonica peristromata" occur at every instant under the pens of the Latin poets, who cannot find praise enough to celebrate them. The amateurs in Rome bought these tapestries for their weight in gold. Metellus Scipio paid 800,000 sesterces (\$40,000) for "Triclinaria Babylonica," and Nero paid for these same hangings four million Sesterces (\$200,000),



FIRST ATELIER OPENED AT WILLIAMSBRIDGE, 1893.



I will not detain you longer with antiquity, although much might be said on our subject with the Greeks during the time of Phidias and Alexander, and the Hebrews under Solomon and Herodes, who rebuilt the temple 19 years before our era, all of whom witnessed a state of great splendor in the production of tapestries and other textile fabrics.

I will also pass over the long line of centuries since the Roman Empire, when the secret of the tapestry loom seems almost to have been lost, and come down to more modern times.

The oldest pieces of real tapestry which are now extant do not date back further than the end of the twelfth century. There are only a few—two are in the Cathedral of Halberstadt, in Germany. They hang above the stalls of the choir, are each 43 feet long by 3½ feet high, and represent scenes from the Old Testament, also “Christ and the Twelve Apostles,” “St. George killing the Dragon,” an Emperor, with the inscription, “Carolus Rex,” etc. Another tapestry was in Cologne in the Church St. Gereon, the three fragments of which were sold by the Canon of the Church to the Museums of Lyons, Nuremburg, and the South Kensington, where they are preserved to-day. Undoubted evidence exists that all these specimens were

produced in Germany about the year 1200, and according to the best connoisseurs, such as Mr. Darcel, Director of the Gobelin Works, they were woven on what is called the "Haute-lisse" loom.

### DURING THE XIII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

the art of tapestry-making is supposed to have found its re-birth, and according to the old historians many important specimens must have been produced, but only one panel is now existing from that period, and it is likewise in Germany in the Abbey of Quedlinburg. It represents the marriage of Mercury and Philology, and was executed by the Abbess Agnes, assisted by her nuns.

### THE XIV<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

sees the rise of our Art into great strength and importance, especially in France and Flandres. Paris, Arras, and Brussels secure for themselves the supremacy, owing to the ability of their weavers. The rest of Europe imperceptibly accustoms itself to apply for their supplies to these better organized centers, and gradually unlearns the technique with which it was so familiar. When 150 years later Italy, Spain, England and Germany tried to free themselves from the heavy tribute to foreign makers, they had to send for Franco-

Flemish craftsmen to teach them anew the secrets which these had made their own by a century of practice.

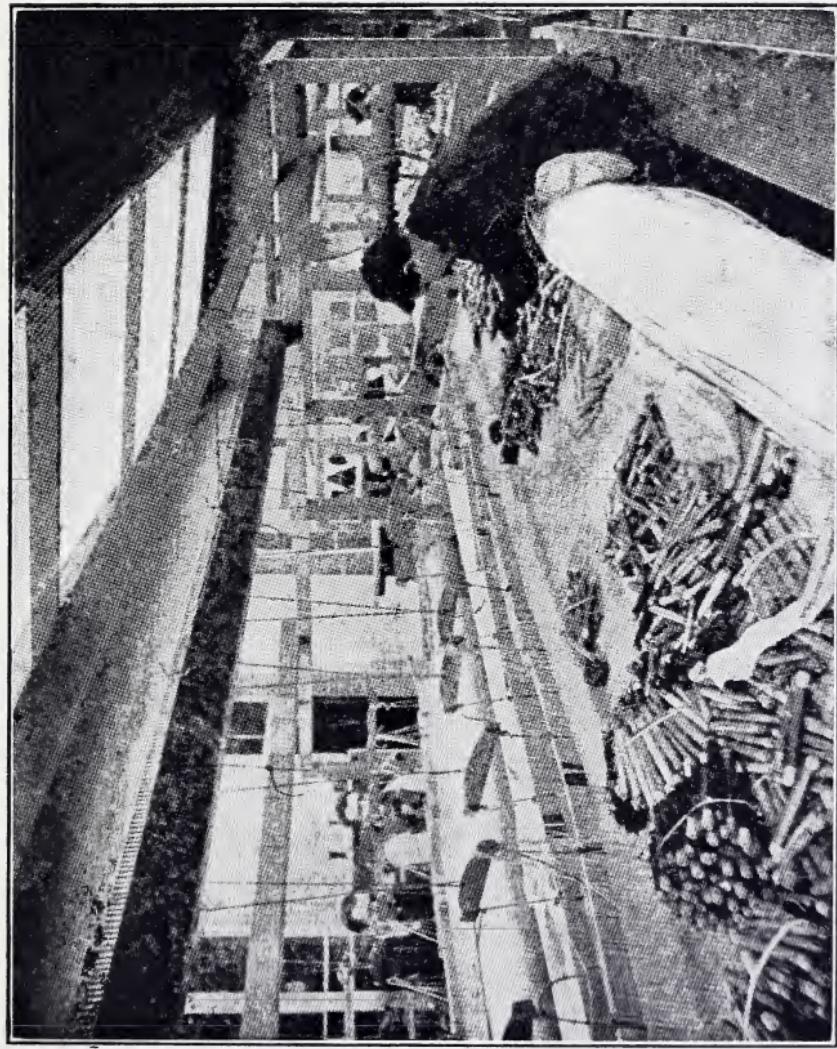
With the beginning of the reign of Charles V. (1364-1380) the history of art really takes form, and from this time on one can follow the works of the artists attached to the service of the King and study original monuments preserved in the Gardemeubles of the French government. The most famous Tappissier of this period was Nicolas Bataille of Paris, who in thirteen years produced for the Duke of Burgundy alone 250 pieces of great magnificence, woven in gold threads and fine Arras silk. Together with his confrère Jacques Dourdin, they supplied the King, his brothers, his uncles, and many foreign sovereigns with numberless tapestries, all as precious in quality as interesting in subjects.

It would be impossible here to give any further details of the works of these two remarkable artists, but it may be interesting to know that the remuneration they received for their best tapestries, woven with gold threads, was about \$350 per square yard in our money value. Nor did the Flemish ateliers show any less activity than their French competitors, and the town of Arras rose to such high reputation through the

superiority of her dyes and her fabrics that the contemporaries designated by “Arras-tapestry” or “Arrazzi” the most perfect, the richest and most precious tapestries which were then made.

### THE XVTH CENTURY

Is the golden age of tapestry making. The ateliers of Northern France and Flanders rise to a height and attain a perfection hitherto unknown. The whole of Europe testifies its admiration by lavishing its orders upon them, or hiring their master workman. Henceforth there was no fête where Arras hangings were not given the place of honor; were it the coronation of an Emperor, a King, or a Pope, the canonization of a Saint, a triumphal entry, a tournament, a marriage, or a simple banquet—everywhere appeared masses of these soft and silky hangings of brilliant coloring. Powerful monarchs did not blush to borrow, when their own stock was exhausted, additional pieces from their neighbors to do honor to some guest of distinction. They were taken along in travel—yes, even in war—witness the tapestries of Charles the Bold which were found on the battlefield by the Swiss victors and furnished the most precious trophy of their victory, England, Spain and Italy were not behind to rival in that respect with the Kings of France and the Dukes of Bur-



ADDITIONAL ATELIERS ERECTED 1894.



gundy. In Rome, at the inauguration of the newly elected Pope, the procession received its greatest splendor from the imposing display of tapestries along its passage from the Vatican to the Lateran. Everywhere, North and South, one can see even the most humble towns deck themselves as if by magic with tapestry hangings to receive a victorious general or an allied Prince. No other ornament could have lent itself to such varied combinations as these movable, undulating paintings which seemed somehow alive.

In the preceding century we have seen Pairs fairly rival with Arras, but in the XVth century it was totally eclipsed by the latter city, which in its turn was destined to succumb before the rising greatness of Brussels by the end of this same century. Arras was the center where especially the Princes of the house of Burgundy recruited their supplies. The list of tapestries which Philip the Good and Charles the Bold alone had produced in this city would be too long to be enumerated here, suffice it to say that from 1423 to 1467 the City of Arras counted not less than fifty-nine master weavers with several thousand workmen. The taking of the city by Louis XI. in 1477, and the expulsion of her inhabitants in 1479 gave a death blow to her industry from which she did not recuperate.

Of Brussels, we have record that the guild of tapestry weavers were reorganized in 1448 under the name of the "Legwerckers Ambacht." The statutes were very strict, and provided, among other things, that each master could have only one apprentice outside of his own children. A stranger could work in Brussels, if he could show that he had learned the trade for three years in some other town, and the most rigorous measures were taken to ensure the good execution of tapestries. No tapestry was allowed to be sold without having been examined, approved and sealed. The earliest mention of a tapestry purchased at Brussels by the House of Burgundy dates back to 1466. In that year Philip the good acquired a series of the "History of Hannibal" in six pieces, and a series of eight verdures. It is certain that from this time on the Brussels ateliers rivaled with those of Arras, till they finally superseded them entirely.

The mass of Franco-Flemish productions which have come down to us is so great that it would be difficult, if not an impossible task to even classify them, or to describe the distinctive features of the products of each of the great centers of manufacture, such as Brussels, Arras, Lille, Bruges, Tournai, Oudenarde, etc. It can, however, be affirmed that towards the end of the XVth



ONE OF THE WALL PANELS OF VERDURE TAPESTRY EXECUTED FOR  
THE LARGE DINING ROOM OF THE MANHATTAN HOTEL.

6 ft. 3 in. high x 14 ft. 6 in. wide.



century tapestry had reached a degree of perfection which has not since been surpassed.

If one examines the "Mass of St. Gregory" in the Nuremberg Museum, or the "Triumph and the Marriage of Beatrice," in the collection of the late Sir Richard Wallace, or the religious compositions of the now dispersed famous Spitzer collection, one acquires the conviction that it is impossible to carry technical ability further. In precision of design, the splendor and harmony of colors, the weavers of this time can have absolutely nothing to learn from their successors, and the "Marriage of Beatrice" can safely be put next to the "Marriage of Louis XIV," the *chef d'œuvre* of Le Brun.

The history of the XV<sup>th</sup> century would not be complete without mentioning Italy where the Flemish industry exercised the greatest influence and was the direct cause of the establishment of many important ateliers. From 1420 to 1500 whole swarms of emigrant tapestry weavers settled in Italy, coming from Arras, Lille, Bruges, Tournai, Brussels. The Dukes of Ferrare, Urbino, Mantua, as well as Venice, Tuscany and Umbria started tapestry ateliers. But while Italy procured its artisans from Flandres, her own artists began to provide cartoons, and thus becomes henceforth a very important factor in the development of our Art. Soon

Italy produced works that equalled the best productions of Arras and Brussels, which is not astonishing when one reads that the authors of these cartoons were called Cosimo Tura, Andrea Mantegna, Leonardo da Vinci, etc. Not only that, but heaps of cartoons painted by the greatest Italian artists were sent to Flandres, there to be executed by Flemish workmen, and thus the way was paved for the commencement and introduction of the Renaissance.

### THE XVIITH CENTURY

consecrated the part which the middle ages had assigned to the tapestry. In the public festivals, as well as in the interior decorations, tapestry continued to hold first rank ; it would be difficult to cite a festive event in which tapestry did not assist. The King of France, François Premier, and the Emperor Charles V rivaled with each other in the possession and display on all occasions of these magnificent fabrics of silk and gold. In Italy, Pope Leo X ordered tapestries for the wall decoration of the Sixtine Chapel, and the walls of the Consistory ;—the Doges of Venice for the Ducal Palace, the Medicis of Florence, the d'Estes, the Gonzagues seek these precious fabrics with equal passion. They are counted by the hundreds placed in their

palaces or villas, and even then they hardly excel the municipalities, the Chapters of Churches in this infatuated pursuit.

If we consider the choice of subjects, we find that here also tapestry is intimately connected with the national life, with the religious, political, and intellectual preoccupations of the epoch. Without renouncing to draw from Scripture, they go back with enthusiasm to Mythology and ancient history. The souvenirs of the middle ages, with their romances of Knighthood and Tournaments, are laid aside and a new spirit seeks light. Allegory continues to flourish, but taking more and more antique form ; and lastly but chiefly Princes and Municipalities perpetuate the souvenir of their victories.

The struggles of this great and lively epoch are nowhere revived with so much brilliancy. During the best period of the Renaissance, the most illustrious painters had to compose the cartoons destined to be translated into tapestries. In Italy, Raphael, Giulio Romano, Andrea del Sarto, Bronzino, Tizian, Paul Veronese, and many others acquitted themselves of this mission. In Flandres, Bernard Van Orley, Michel Coxie, and Pierre de Campana, and others, endowed the textile art with models not less interesting.

The intervention of Raphael could not fail to influence greatly the fate of tapestry. Was it beneficial or fatal? This is a question which in recent times has often been asked. It cannot be denied that in spite of the importance which Raphael accorded the decorative element in the borders of his compositions, he has treated the compositions themselves like regular frescoes, and not like models of hangings. His favorite pupil, Giulio Romano, exaggerated this tendency still more, until it finally prevailed in Italy as well as in Flandres. The consequences of this revolution were, that the tapestry, like architecture, assumes a character of greater elegance, the style is broadened and purified, the compositions become freer, gayer, ampler, they lose their rigid forms, the nude appears with all its might, and it seems as though the air and light have penetrated the tapestries as they did the house. On the other hand, some of our ablest artists and connoisseurs have criticised these modifications, maintaining that it is always objectionable to leave a large vacant sky effect in the upper part of a composition for a tapestry, for the reason that it loses the idea of a hanging intended to cover a wall, and rather resembles an open window through which enter and pass the various figures.

But what marvels do we not owe to the initiative of Raphael! Only to mention the design of the border, which received a new birth, an undreamed of richness and splendor, crowned with cupids, flowers, arabesques and figures. From the time when Pope Leo X commissioned Raphael to paint the famous cartoon representing "The Acts of the Apostles," and sent them to Brussels to be executed, he set an example which found only too many followers. Henceforth Italy had the monopoly of the invention as Brussels held that of the manufacture. It was in the year 1515 when this refined and magnificent patron of the Arts, Leo X, ordered this famous series in Brussels, which alone would have sufficed to immortalize the ateliers of the ancient Flemish capital. The artist to whom the Pope entrusted this memorable work was Pierre Van Aelst, who for more than thirty years was incontestably the prince of the Flemish tapestry weavers. The cartoons were ten in number, and measured 16 feet in height and 140 feet in total length. They were commenced in 1515 and completed by the end of 1519, in four years, an incredibly short time, and which proves how much better the Flemish ateliers of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century were than those of the Gobelins of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, not to speak of the Gobelins of to-day.

It must also be stated, however, that the Pope never flinched before any sacrifice. The execution of these tapestries cost him 15,000 ducats, or in our money \$150,000; and he paid Raphael 1,000 ducats, or \$10,000, for the cartoons; and it must not be forgotton that the purchasing power of money had in those days probably four or five times the value of to-day. The gold ducat or florin of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century weighed about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  grammes; it represents about \$10 of our money.

When the "Acts of the Apostles" were for the first time shown in the Sixtine Chapel, in Rome, on Christmas Day, 1519, they excited an indescribable admiration. "The whole chapel," says a contemporary, "stood astounded before these hangings; there was one unanimous verdict—that nothing more beautiful existed in all the world." Thirty years later, the great art historian, Vasari, this connoisseur with an infallible and refined taste, showers no less sincere and enthusiastic praises on the work of Pierre Van Aelst. "One is astounded," he says, "in regarding this suite; the execution is a marvel. One can hardly conceive how it is possible with simple threads to produce a finesse similar to the hair and beard, and give the softness of the living flesh. It is a work more divine than human. The water, the animals, the architecture, are rendered

with such perfection that they seem to be painted with the help of a brush, and not woven by hand."

The original cartoons, with the exception of three, remained in Brussels until 1630, when, thanks to the suggestion of Rubens, Charles I. of England acquired them by purchase, and they are preserved to-day at the Kensington Museum. They served Van Aelst and his successors for the execution of many replicas of this famous suite, the best of which are those owned to-day by the Museums of Berlin and Dresden, the series in the royal palace in Madrid, the palace in Vienna, and the Cathedral of Lorette. The original set still exists to-day, after some strange adventures,\* in the Vatican in Rome.

I must abstain from a further mention or description of the long line of incomparable tapestries, and the many perfect chef d'œuvres of the textile art, which saw the light of day in the celebrated Flemish metropolis during the first half of the XVIth Century. She

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\* At the death of the Pope in 1521, they were pawned for the sum of \$50,000; in 1527, during the horrible pillage of Rome, several were stolen; one was even cut into pieces. These wrecks, two of which had drifted to Constantinople, were, thanks to the efforts of Marshal Montmorency, again secured for the Vatican. After the entry of the French troops in Rome, at the end of the last century, the whole series were purchased by a syndicate of brokers, who exhibited them at the Louvre in 1798.

In the first years of this century Pope Pius VII. succeeded in reacquiring them for the Vatican, where they were put in place again in 1808; they have not left there since.

completely eclipsed all rivals, and, before her extraordinary rise, all other centers in France and Flanders seemed to be almost crushed out of existence by her competition.

The second half of the XVIth Century, however, witnessed a visible decline of Brussels' prosperity. The internal troubles, the bloody persecutions were accompanied by a degeneracy of taste. The intimacy and sincerity which lent so much charm to the Flemish tapestry of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance gradually disappeared. In the place of those excellent garlands of flowers and fruit appear borders with pumpkins, carrots, and onions, interspersed with allegorical figures, as banal as they were incorrect; the fabric loses its fineness, the coloring its brightness and harmony. Henceforth Brussels' tapestry industry still vegetated for a long time, but it is fast losing its superiority.

In the meantime Italy has commenced a brilliant start at our industry. Not satisfied with furnishing the cartoons for the rest of Europe, she sent for many capable artists and artisans to help her establish her own ateliers. At Ferrare, at Milan, Mantua, Venice, and Genoa, ateliers sprang into existence, but chiefly at Florence, under Cosimus the Ist, a factory was





PART OF WALL FRIEZE EXECUTED FOR

DINING ROOM OF W. L. ELKINS, ESO.

Height, 6 feet 8 inches.







started, which soon became famous; it was known under the name of the “Arazzeria Medicea,” and lasted as long as the Medici were in power, that is, until the beginning of the XVIII. century.

Two Flemish masters of renown, Jean Rost and Nicholas Karcher, were called to take charge of the works in 1549, on a contract of three years, which was renewed in 1552, and from this moment the works went on uninterruptedly for more than 150 years. Among the artists whom Cosimus attached to his ducal factory were Bronzino and Salviati, in the front rank. The former composed the famous suite representing the “Story of Joseph,” which are still to be seen to-day at the Palazzo Vecchio, in Florence, and have lost nothing of their original splendor. Salviati composed the “History of Alexander the Great,” and the “Story of Lucrezia,” the beauty of which is celebrated by Vasari; a third famous master, Francesco d’Albertino, furnished the cartoons for the “Twelve Months” and the “Grotesques,” all of which hung until recently in the corridors of the Uffizzi Gallery, and are now housed in the Museum of Archæology. The upper stories of this Museum are exclusively devoted to the exhibition of tapestries, mostly made in the Arrazzeria Medicea. During my visit there last summer I examined many

hundreds placed on view, and I am told that several thousand pieces more are owned by the city and stored in its Garde de Meubles.

## THE XVII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

saw the foundation of the Gobelin factory in Paris, and from that time France steps into the front rank in the art of tapestry making, which it has held ever since.

The economic importance of such an art industry did not escape the clear sightedness of Henry IV. This great king neglected nothing to develop and protect the national ateliers against foreign competition. In 1607 he sent for two able artists from Flandres, François de la Planche and Marc Coomans. He installed them in the Faubourg St. Marceau, gave them a charter of the monopoly for twenty-five years, letters of nobility, considerable subsidies, and extended privileges. The King gave them and their workmen free lodging, and exempted them from all taxes for twenty-five years; he gave them as apprentices twenty-five boys the first year, twenty the second, and as many the third, all French children, for whom he paid the board and expenses. The import of all foreign tapestries was forbidden, and the native product was to be sold at the selling prices of those in The Netherlands. A large

staff of the foremost painters was charged with the execution of the cartoons of the various works, among them Lerambert, Laurent, Dubreuil, Guyot, etc.

Such was the royal beginning of this royal art industry in France. It did not last very long. Three years later, in 1610, Henry IV. was murdered by Ravaillac, and the death of the King was a fatal blow to the enterprise of De la Planche and Coomans. After many vicissitudes these two masters installed themselves, in 1630, at the Gobelins, where they definitely fixed themselves. From this period date many important productions, such as the "Caledonian Boar Hunt," the "Sacrifice of Abraham," etc.

The year 1662 marks a memorable date in the annals of tapestry. It witnessed the establishment of the Royal Manufactory of the Furniture of the Crown, or to call it by its modern name, "The Manufacture of the Gobelins." Under the direction of his able minister, Colbert, one of the first acts of Louis XIV. was to choose a talented director and painter to make the designs, and his choice fell fortunately on LeBrun. Le Brun shares with the great Rubens the glory of having forever impressed their trace on our art, and raised it again to the height of Raphael and Van Aelst in the preceding century. If we leave aside the painters

who more or less accidentally have furnished models for tapestry at this period, such as Jordaens and Teniers at Flandres, or Lerambert, Guyot, Poussin, Philip de Champagne, Vander Meulen, Coypel, in France—one name dominates the whole of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, together with that of Rubens, and that is Charles Le Brun. He has done more for the decorative arts than all the rest put together. The sentiment of decoration is so vivid in him that his paintings seem transfigured in passing from the canvas on the loom; their translation in a different art gives them more splendor, a richer and more masculine harmony. It is the same with those large panels of ceremony, that incomparable series called “The History of Louis XIV.” When these dazzling hangings of silk and gold are moved, one feels a religious tremor—one almost expects to see Alexander, le roi-dieu, and Louis XIV., le roi-soleil, descend from their triumphal car, or the steps of the throne, to mingle with us.

At the head of the looms were placed such masters as Jans from Andenarde, with a number of Flemish workmen, and Jean Lefevre from Brussels, who had been some years in Florence under the Medici. The Gobelins were, at the time when Louis XIV. and Colbert decided to install their new factory, enjoying a great

industrial reputation. The family which gave them their name came here from Rheims in the XVTH century as dyers, and owing to their expert knowledge and excellent qualities of the water of the little river Bièvre, became rapidly famous and prosperous. It seems that the manufacture of tapestry was added to their dye works in 1630, for which they associated themselves with Coomans and De la Planche, as stated before. The new manufactory of the Government soon displayed an extraordinary activity. 250 workmen were employed, and to the masters, Jans and Lefevre, were added three more, Laurent, Delacroix and Mosin. Le Brun himself had a veritable army of painters under his orders, the number is stated to be forty-nine for the royal factories alone, from 1663 to 1690, when LeBrun died. In these twenty-eight years the factory completed nineteen series of haute-lisse containing about 1,400 square meters, and costing about 2,500,000 francs, or about 2,000 per square meter, not including the cost of the cartoons. It also completed in this period thirty, four series of basse-lisse measuring 1,500 square meters and costing about 1,500,000, or 1,000 francs per square meter.

The principal series are "The Acts of the Apostles" after Raphael, "The Story of Moses" after Poussin

and Le Brun, "The History of the King" by Le Brun and Vander Meulen, "History of Alexander," "The Elements," "The Seasons," by Le Brun, "Les Châteaux de France," by Le Brun and Vander Meulen, etc., etc., too many to mention here. All of these are at this day in the possession of the French Government and are jewels of its many treasures.

Toward the latter part of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, in 1664, was also established the manufactory at Beauvais by a Parisian tapestry merchant, named Louis Hinart, who managed to obtain privileges and subsidies from the King, but did not succeed as well as he had promised. It only began to flourish when 20 years later, 1684, the able Philippe Behacle from Tournai became its manager, and when, in 1694, the Gobelins were closed by the King, owing to lack of funds on account of his wars, Beauvais was sufficiently flourishing to permit him to employ a large number of the men discharged at the Gobelins. He executed a large order for the King of Sweden, also the "The Acts of the Apostles" for the Cathedral of Beauvais, the "Conquests of Louis XIV.," etc.

It would lead me too far to speak in detail of the history of tapestry outside of France during this XVII<sup>th</sup> century. Brussels and the rest of Flandres

continued to produce enormously, but the star of the Renaissance, and with it the former high quality, fast disappeared, although David Teniers, with his rustic compositions, assured them for a while a new vogue. In Italy, only the Florentine factory continued to produce, and here as in Flandres, the “basse-lisse” loom was substituted for the *haute-lisse* loom, as a means of more rapid and therefore cheaper production.

The making of tapestry even spread to Germany, where the Elector of Bavaria established a factory at Munich, and to England where Jacob I. employed 50 Flemish workmen at Mortlake, and both countries produced works of a high degree of perfection, artistically as well as mechanically. Yes, even Denmark and Russia established tapestry works, so great was the universal favor in which these wonderful fabrics were held everywhere.

### IN THE XVIII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

a new spirit invades the character of tapestry. With perfect ease it adapts itself to the tastes and requirements of this new society, which is as lively, as spirituelle, and as frivolous as that of Louis XIV.’s time was grave and solemn.

The boudoir supplants the vast and sumptuous

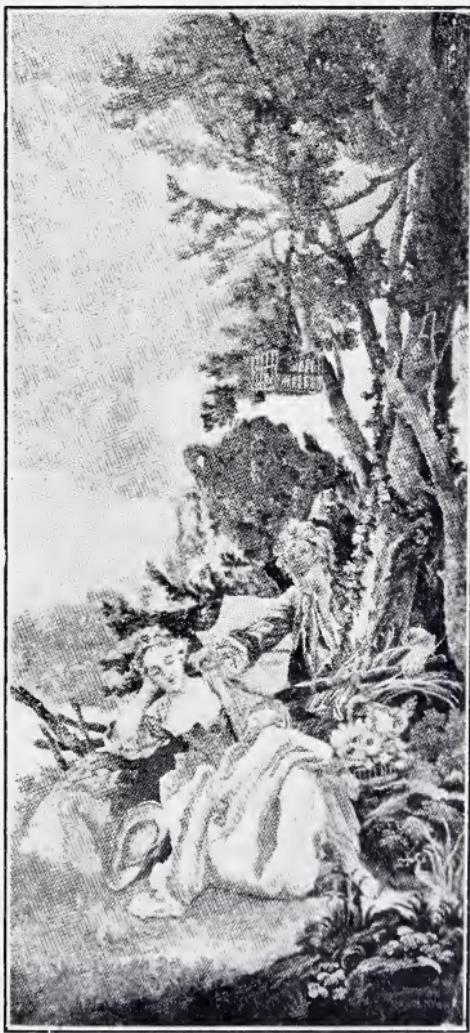
salon ; the small art dethrones the great ; historical compositions and monumental hangings are done for. While Louis XIV. perpetuated the grand acts of his reign in suites of tapestries on the grandest scale, Louis XV. thought himself quits with posterity by offering it the souvenir of his hunting exploits. The pomp of "The Triumph of Alexander" is followed by the comic adventures of Don Quichote ; the execution of a garniture of furniture-covering is prized far beyond a suite of figure panels.

Oudry and Boucher become the successors of Le Brun, which explains all, and yet in its exhaustible adaptability, tapestry accepts all these changes, submits to all caprices of fashion. The contemporary artists please themselves to lead this over-refined world of the Court and the City to ideal regions. Boucher paints the Olympian Gods—Le Prince, the Bohemians—Van Loo, the Sultanas—Desportes, Scenes from India—Fontenay, Chinese scenes and Casanova Russian festivals. This remarkable tendency of looking at things through a prism appears most forcible in the so-called "Pastorale" compositions, so deliciously false, where the shepherds seem to have just stepped out of the Versailles Palace for the first time, and raiments of the shepherdesses have nothing to envy of a duchess. In





PANEL, GENRE BOUCHER. PASTORALE  
MADE FOR P. A. B. WIDENER, ESQ.



PANEL, GENRE BOUCHER. PASTORALE  
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the same way the seats and backs of sofas and chairs were covered with "pastorales" or scenes from Lafontaine's fables, or even mythological compositions, landscapes, etc., so that one had to sit down on a seaport or sheep and shepherdesses, etc. This new fashion swept everything before it, and made the fortune of the Beauvais factory. And it is necessary to add that these furniture coverings, taken by themselves, are exquisitely charming and well able to disarm the severest criticism ?

The cartoons with which Boucher enriched the Gobelins met with instant success; they were "Neptune and Amymone," "Venus in the Smithy of Vulcan," "Psyche and Amor," "The Fortune Teller," "Aminthe and Sylvie," etc., and numberless cupids, playing children, etc., beautifully framed in flowers and other ornaments.

But to this strange aberration of taste was soon added another more serious departure from the tradition of the former age. Commenced by Oudry and followed by Boucher, these great artists in their eager desire to rival with painting, to produce the threads of wool and silk compositions giving the very illusion of oil painting, did not hesitate to employ the most delicate and fugitive colors, and aided by the Government chem-

ists, with more zeal than prudence, arrived at an assortment of over a thousand colors, each subdivided into twelve shades from light to dark. What was the result? In a short time the harmonious color scheme vanished; while certain parts preserved their original splendor, others gradually faded. The most beautiful pieces were rapidly spoiled by serious changes in the coloring. Nobody thought of to-morrow in this time. The contemporaries felt enchanted with the immediate results. Was anything else needed? And it must be admitted, that the charm exercised by Boucher and his school, Audran, Cozette, and others, is felt even to the present day; their graceful compositions of mythological and allegorical subjects, their touching and sprightly pastorales never failed to excite admiration, but when their new theories were continued by their less talented successors, it became evident on what fatal downward road tapestry-making had embarked.

We have now arrived at the end of the XVIIIth century, and with that, at the end of the last important era of our art of tapestry-making. While the Gobelin factory has been going on, even during the time of the revolution, ever since, it had for a long time only a bare existence. Brussels and all other centers of tapestry-making had not a single loom left

in operation. This ruin was not due to political troubles at the beginning of the present century only, nor even chiefly; one of the causes was undoubtedly the fickleness of fashion, and another the dispersion of large fortunes, and in consequence the search for cheap substitutes. Paper hangings and woven stuffs took the place occupied for many centuries by tapestries, and the disdain for these noble fabrics went so far as to relegate them to the garrets, abandoned to the dust and vermin.

Only in our day, thanks to the efforts of some men of taste, they are again beginning to find their rightful place in the public collections, in the homes of the cultivated rich, in the artist's studios. This movement cannot be checked any more, and it is steadily on the increase, and it may safely be predicted that the value of these fabrics will rise in still greater proportion.

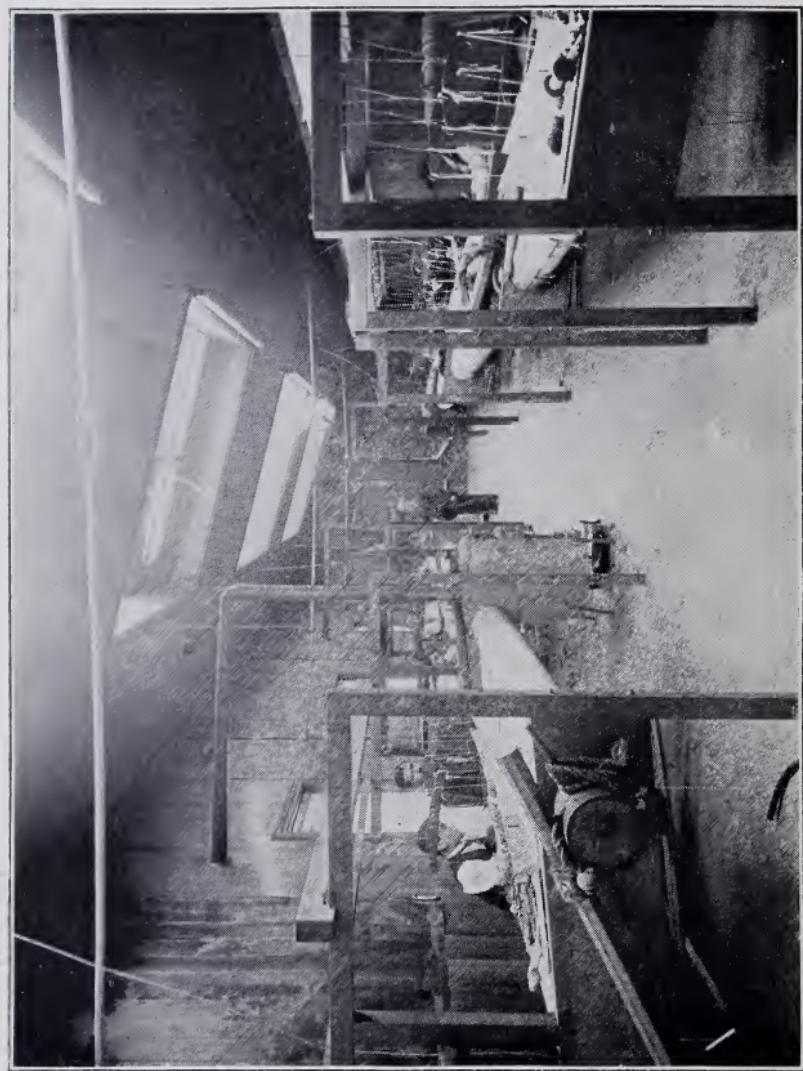
In recent years tapestry-making is having a sort of revival from its long slumber. Outside of the two factories of the French Government, the Gobelins and the Beauvais, which employ, all told, about eighty persons, there are two private establishments of some importance, both at Aubusson, employing together about one hundred persons. A few small ateliers also exist in Neuilly, near Paris—this is all that exists in

France to-day. Some years ago an atelier was started or rather reopened in Rome, Italy, at the San Michele Hospito, under the direction of Giuseppi Printo. Also in Berlin, Germany, an atelier was started by a Mr. Ziesch under the patronage of the present Emperor. This last one is entirely operated by girls, about twenty in number. I saw there some fine old Boucher tapestries belonging to the Emperor being repaired, but of their own productions I saw only chair covers and some screen panels.

Then, there was the attempt in 1876 to establish tapestry weaving in England, and works were started in Windsor under the patronage of the Queen, under the name of "The Royal Windsor Tapestry Works." Never was a new establishment better endowed with funds in the beginning, and large yearly contributions for a number of years, and aided from the outset with most liberal commissions by the Royal family and other princely houses in and out of England.

I had occasion in 1882 to visit the works for the purpose of inspecting the progress of the tapestries then being made for the hall and staircase wall frieze in the residence of Mr. C. Vanderbilt. This was intended for his new residence at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street, which was then being erected, the first half of





LAST ADDITION TO ATELIERS, ERECTED 1895.

his present residence. The works were located in an old roomy country house, surrounded with large garden, shaded by vines and large trees, and the looms were distributed over the various rooms. In appearance everything seemed extremely prosperous about the works, but I learned afterwards that the management indulged in the most reckless expenditures.

The works were managed by two different councils—  
~~one~~ the Council of Patrons, under the presidency of Prince Leopold and such gentlemen as Sir Richard Wallace, the Duke of Westminster, Henry Brassey and a few others, and the Council of Artists, ~~five in number~~, under the presidency of Mr. Henry. The duties of the Council of Patrons seem to have been chiefly to constantly provide funds for carrying on the works, and eventually to take a large part of the product at enormous prices. The Council of Artists held monthly meetings, discussing the weal and woe of the new industry, drawing large salaries (I believe one thousand pounds each per year) and awarding to themselves the painting of the cartoons at large compensations.

Of course the result was that the productions became so high that the prices charged the noble clients and patrons was out of all proportion to their value, and while they allowed themselves to be victimized for a

few years in the interest of national glory and in the belief that after a fair start things would mend in the way of economy, they at last became aware of the utter inability of the management to make the work self-supporting, and naturally ceased their contributions from the Queen down, and the collapse was the immediate result. This occurred in 1887, after an existence of a little over ten years.

You may remember at the World's Fair there were a large number of so called "Verdure" panels hung on the wall of the large center aisle in the Art Building, and were exhibited as belonging to the Queen, and made at the Windsor Works. If you recall them at all, you will agree with me that they were neither distinguished in coloring, which was without charm and very dingy, nor by their design, which seemed to be a sort of an English adaptation of old Aubusson verdures.

Upon my inquiry whether they were for sale, I was told that they might be had, and their price would be, if I remember rightly, \$400 a panel. I should be pleased to receive orders for similar work at \$200 a panel, and would guarantee to execute them better in design, color, and quality at that price.

cc The history of our own enterprise is soon told. When the thought first came to me of attempting the

introduction of tapestry-making in this country, I was fully aware of the magnitude of the task and of the serious obstacles to be overcome. It was, of course, necessary to bring the artizans over from France, and to build the looms, as a first step. This seems simple enough, and yet, had we not had the good fortune of finding Mr. Foussadier, the former master workman of the Royal Windsor Tapestry Works in England it might have been very difficult to get other first-class men to come after him. They are all unwilling to leave France, and could only be induced by the promise of higher wages, the guarantee of steady work for at least a year and the free passage over and back.

Mr. Foussadier with his family came over the early part of January, 1893, bringing with him a small loom which was at once set up in one of our rooms at No. 321 Fifth Avenue, and work began. I can here show you the first piece of tapestry produced. It is a small chair seat, and took about two weeks to make. It is a simple and modest production, but is not for sale, and is intended to remain an heirloom in my family as the first piece of tapestry produced in America. The second piece, exactly the same, was soon produced, and this found its way, through the kindly interest of its wide awake Director, to the Field Museum in Chicago.

22 Four more weavers soon followed my new superintendent, one after another, in the first few months. In the meantime we had built more looms, and it had become necessary to find a suitable home for their ateliers, and my choice fell on a house in Williamsbridge, which was in former years a French restaurant and hotel, where I spent many a happy Sunday in the springtide of my Bohemian days, 30 years ago. There is quite a French settlement there, and I thought my men would feel more at home there than elsewhere. As a matter of fact, they have found here a little paradise.

22 But we soon made another happy discovery. Mr. Foussadier, who is as expert a dyer as he is a weaver, soon discovered at his first experiments, that the water of the Bronx River, which flows at our door, possesses the most excellent qualities for dying purposes. This is owing to the dissolved vegetable substances which it contains. I may here mention that this same quality was attributed to the water of the little river La Biéver in the Faub St. Marcel, near Paris, where the Gobelins located their dye works in the XV<sup>th</sup> Century, and which became so famous on account of their superiority over all others. The present Gobelin works, however, have for a long time ceased to employ the Biéver

young

40  
in





ONE OF THE TAPESTRY PANELS MADE



TRUSTEE ROOM, N. Y. LIFE INS. CO.



water, which had gradually become too impure, and have sought to supply by the progress of chemistry the qualities which that water possessed.

¶ The next step was to secure apprentices, with the view of making the industry gradually a native one and independent of foreign workmen. This, however, proved more difficult. It is one of the evils of this country that boys, after leaving school, are not permitted or bound to serve a regular apprenticeship for three or four years, as in Europe, to properly learn a trade. They are required by their parents to earn at once \$3 or \$4 a week which drives them into the stores and messenger offices, etc. It is evident that for the first year or two little, if anything, is of value to me that can be done by these boys. On the contrary, they require constant tuition and use up material which constitutes an actual loss to me. However, I determined to make the sacrifice in order to make a beginning, and we took on two boys to whom we promised \$2 per week the first year, \$4 the second year, \$6 the third and \$8 the fourth. These were followed by two more boys the second year, and again by two more the third. All six are now doing very well, and the first two are already producing quite good work.

¶ Thus, the first year was employed to get well started

and to produce a number of specimens, such as curtains, portières, borders, chair coverings, etc., of various qualities to show what we could do. It was at the end of the first year, in April, 1894, that I had the honor to read before the National Society of Sculpture, New York, a little paper on our tapestry industry, and to submit to their inspection some of our first productions. They were not very pretentious, to be sure, and I said then that my ambition and aim was much higher, that I hoped some day to make wall panels of as high an artistic merit and as excellent in workmanship as the best of the preceding centuries. For such work, however, one must have orders, and in these depressed times they were not easily obtained.

*cc* Shortly after this lecture before the National Sculpture Society, I arranged a little exhibition of the first year's products, in one of our warerooms, and sent out cards. This was in May, 1894. In response to the invitation, among many others, a gentleman from Philadelphia walked in on a fine May morning, saying he wished to see the show. He liked to take in shows that cost nothing, he said. After some conversation and a careful inspection of our new productions, he said, "So you would like to make more ambitious things, wall

panels with figure compositions, eh? Do you think you could do as well as those old fellows of a hundred or two hundred years ago?" To which I meekly answered that I would try, if I had the opportunity. "Well," he said, "I will give you the opportunity. Come over to Philadelphia next week and I will show you the room." The result was that, after making colored sketches, which took about a month and which were approved, I received my first commission for a complete set of wall panels for a Parlor, 13 in number, all in the genre of Boucher, with what is called "Pastorale Scenes." It also included the furniture coverings and two pairs of portières, and the cost amounted to over \$20,000. The work was completed by the first of December, 1895, in about 15 months. I had the gratification of having our work pass muster before the critical eyes of many leading artists and connoisseurs, and it has given the greatest pleasure ever since to my courageous and generous client in Philadelphia. *M*

(His name is P. A. B. Widener.)

"The number of workmen were, of course, immediately increased by fresh importations from Europe. Six of them came in a lot, and were duly stopped by the Immigration Commissioners as contract laborers. Then began my troubles. I was ordered to appear

before this august tribunal of wise judges, six in number, mostly Irish and German politicians, who knew absolutely nothing about tapestry, and could not be made to believe that in this, the greatest of all the countries in the world, there were no such beings as tapestry weavers to be found, and that it was absolutely a new industry I was founding, for which the law allows the admission of imported workmen. I gave them a most exhaustive lecture, with historical and statistical data, whilst my poor Frenchmen sat by like prisoners, not knowing what it was all about. However, to make a long story short, after a few days they were liberated by an order from the Secretary of the Treasury, and thus escaped the dreadful fate of being returned to their own lovely country, *La Belle France.*

I am sure, should I find myself again in a similar predicament, the present incomparable Secretary of the Treasury, your eminent townsman, would not need much coaxing on my part to keep the door wide open for more such artisans to come in.

We had hardly begun work upon this first important order when, through the influence of our celebrated architects, McKim, Meade & White, I received a second large and important commission for wall panels in the Director's room of the New York Life



ONE OF THE FOUR PANELS EXECUTED IN SILK TAPESTRY  
OF FINE POINT FOR THE SALON OF  
JACOB H. SCHIFF, ESQ.

6 ft. 8 in. high x 5 ft. 9 in. wide.



Insurance company. They were made in a coarse point, landscape effects, with columns and draperies, etc., as I will show you with the camera. More men were sent for and they came.

Before these two orders were finished the third important commission was received for a large dining-room, also in Philadelphia. They were wall panels, in fine Gobelin point, representing a stag hunt from start to finish. It contained about 70 square yards, and cost \$18,000. (The generous client and art patron in this case was Mr. W. L. Elkins.) These panels were finished by the 1st of March, 1896.

By this time we had built a large addition to our building in Williamsbridge, and increased the number of our looms to 22, and the number of our artisans to about 40 (which is more than the Gobelin Works employ to-day). We had the satisfaction of having our productions esteemed by the best connoisseurs, who declare them to be at least equal to any produced in France at the present time. Our enterprise had become a success.

During the last year we executed the splendid wall panels and hangings for the dining-room of Mrs. Elliot F. Shepard, for her new mansion at Scarborough-on-the-Hudson—a room 50 feet long by 36 feet wide, and containing about 200 square yards of tapestry, including

the windows and door curtains and furniture, at a cost of \$60 a square yard.

This order was also suggested to Mrs. Shepard by her architects, McKim, Meade & White.

Another of our leading architects, Mr. Hardenbergh (the architect of the Waldorf and new Astor Hotels) influenced the owners of the new Manhattan Hotel, (one of the newest and best in New York) to order from us the splendid wall panels for their large dining-room, all of which were executed in time, and give the greatest satisfaction.

Another important work of last year, and which has only lately been completed; is for the walls of a stair hall in New York City, in a house built by Mr. Hunt. The subject of this series is another stag hunt.

I will not tire you by a further enumeration of what may seem to you almost a business inventory, and I will only mention, before closing this chapter, that I have also had the honor and the pleasure of making some tapestries for your city here. They were in a house on Erie Street, and, although they were only furniture coverings, I believe that by their design, color, and quality, they have met with a hearty welcome by their gracious owner.

We are now in the fifth year of our new industry,





WOMEN'S ATELIER FOR SEWING AND REPAIRING.

and I am happy to say that our success seems still on the increase. We have important commissions in hand, and others being prepared, among them some of the very highest grade, which we hope will turn out to be "des vrais chef d'œuvres." There is enough to employ all my men the coming year.

As to the men we brought over from France, they have found a Paradise in our little suburban town on the Bronx River. They have settled down for good; and those who left families behind have long since brought them over. Only one man went back to France—not homesick, but physically sick; and one other man was sent back because he was too fond of the bottle. They were all very poor when they landed, and those that came from Aubusson looked more like tramps than skillful artisans. Few had leather shoes, few had as much baggage as would fill a small hand-satchel. Their plight in Aubusson was chiefly the lack of steady work, and, of course, low wages. To-day they are all well dressed, well fed, and well housed; have all saved some money, and are the happiest little colony in the country.





ATELIERS OF TAPESTRY WORKS. REAR VIEW FROM COURT.





